The Solidarity Movement: A Freight Train Derailed

ON UNLUCKY Nov. 13, 1983, International Woodworkers of America president Jack Munro shuffled out onto the porch of Premier Bill Bennett's Kelowna home, and called off one of the largest and potentially most powerful strikes in Canadian history. For tens of thousands of strikers and Solidarity activists it was a shock and a sellout, which ended their hopes of putting a stop to the massive Socred cutbacks program.

This pamphlet describes the birth and growth of Solidarity, and sheds light on some of the dirty dealing that led to its demise. But more importantly, it explains why trade union bureaucrats have always and will always snuff out any workers' movement which threatens to overturn their tidy and comfortable world of negotiation and compromise. Furthermore, it suggests some practical strategies for rank and file workers to counter and avoid any future sellouts in struggles ahead.

OPERATION SOLIDARITY

AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST PAMPHLET $2.00

How OPERATION SOLIDARITY Became

OPERATION SOLDOUT

by Thom Quine

How — And Why — The Union Bureaucrats Sold Out The 1983 Solidarity Movement

HOW OPERATION SOLIDARITY BECAME OPERATION "SOLDOUT" — by Thom Quine

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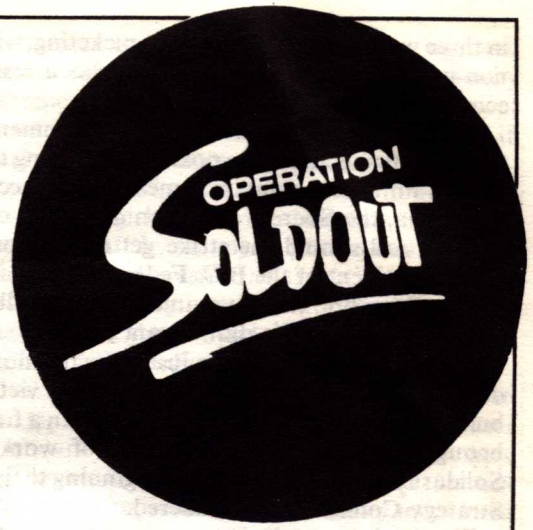

1.
The Solidarity Movement — A Freight Train Derailed

ON UNLUCKY Sunday, November 13, 1983, International Woodworkers' president Jack Munro shuffled out onto the porch of Premier Bill Bennett's Kelowna home and called off one of the largest and potentially most powerful strikes in Canadian history. By that time, more than 85,000 unionists, or more than one out of every ten workers in the province, were on the picket line.

The Solidarity strike was the culmination of months of protest rallies, partial walkouts, massive demonstrations and dedicated organising by hundreds of thousands of British Columbian workers. Their target was the governing B.C. Social Credit Party and its series of cutback programs which slashed social services by 25 per cent or more.

By November 13, most B.C. government workers and education workers were out, but the strike had not yet reached essential public services. The following week would have brought out thousands more ferry workers, bus drivers, municipal workers, and health and hospital workers. If, as was threatened, they were joined by private sector unions (many of whom were in legal strike position), by the end of the month one

in three workers would have been picketing, with hundreds of thousands of non-union workers unable to work as a result. In effect, the provincial economy would have been shut down.

The situation so alarmed the government that they consulted with federal officials about the possibility of using the RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces to maintain some services. According to a high-level leak to the media, the Socreds had even drawn up contingency plans for a snap election call should the strike get out of control. In the opinion of Art Kube, president of the B.C. Federation of Labour, had the strike gone on two weeks more, the government might well have been forced to resign. But, adds Kube, "We didn't want *that*."

They didn't want *that*. So just when the movement seemed unstoppable, defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory by a handful of union bureaucrats. Without winning more than a fraction of the demands which brought hundreds of thousands of workers behind the banner of Solidarity, without even really beginning to fight, the Operation Solidarity Strategy Committee surrendered.

The back-to-work announcement caused initial confusion amongst picketers and activists. Not only were they not given a chance to vote on the Kelowna agreement, but they weren't even told what the agreement consisted of! Within a few days, the confusion had solidified into anger and a widespread conviction that the movement had been sold out. Jack Munro disappeared from public view, but when Art Kube and B.C. Federation of Labour president Mike Kramer tried to speak at a Solidarity rally that week, they were booed into silence, while other speakers who denounced the agreement and called for a general strike got standing ovations.

Actually, the famous "verbal agreement" between Jack Munro and Bill Bennett, known by some as the "Munro doctrine", has been revealed to be a fraud. According to Art Kube, "The whole thing was hyped up. Munro did not negotiate anything with the premier." The *real* agreement was worked out in secret on the night of Friday the 11th, between Jack Munro and Mike Kramer for Operation Solidarity and Norm Spector for the government, and was unanimously ratified by the Operation Solidarity Steering Committee. Bennett's only role was to be informed of the details and participate in a joint press conference, to make it look as if a high level agreement had been just worked out.

But when the agreement came to light, it looked more like an abject surrender. The contract which had already been negotiated by the B.C. Government Employees Union (BCGEU), in effect nullifying Bill 2 and setting a precedent for other public sector unions to negotiate, on their own, exemptions from Bill 3, would be signed by the government. Chief Negotiator for the BCGEU, Cliff Andstein, was "proud" to call the new contract "a no-concessions agreement", despite its zero per cent wage increase in the first year and 3 per cent in the second, despite its giving up entrenched rights on hours and work time flexibility, and despite its refusal to challenge the right of the government to lay off 25 to 30 percent of the entire union.

Apart from the BCGEU contract, Solidarity was given, in the words of Bill Bennett, "Nothing more than what was always offered; an opportunity to consult" with the government on government policy. In the year following the Kelowna accord; the consultation process did not result in one single meaningful amendment to the Socred cutback program.

None of the so-called "social issues", such as the abolition of rent controls, changes in human rights legislation, education cuts, and other social service cuts, which had motivated so many to protest and organize against the government, were ever even discussed in bargaining. According to Kube, "I always took the position that you can't negotiate these issues. The mistake we made is that we said that we did negotiate these issues. That's what got us into trouble (with the Solidarity Coalition)."

Both Kube and Kramer "said that we did not negotiate these issues" in what amounts to a cynical manipulation of public support. They and other members of the Operation Solidarity Steering Committee have since made it clear that their only goal in the whole negotiations was a signed contract for the BCGEU. This means quite simply that the Solidarity movement was defeated from within before it even got off the ground, since only unionized workers had the power to put a stop to the Socreds.

The laid off civil servants were not the only ones to suffer from the defeat of Solidarity. Virtually every social service affecting working class people, from education to health, welfare, emergency services, consumer rights, human rights, tenant's rights, and union rights, have been slashed to the bare minimum or eliminated completely.

Across Canada, the defeat of Solidarity gave heart to governments who had been contemplating cutbacks, and gave caution to workers who had been prepared to fight back.

Perhaps most important of all, the Solidarity defeat demoralized working people when their militancy was most needed — that defeat paved the way for the defeat of workers at B.C. Hydro, the Pulp and Paperworkers, the building trades at Pennyfarthing and Expo '86, and of all unionized workers affected by the new labour code.

How could it happen? How could a handful of union bureaucrats derail and destroy so powerful a train as Solidarity?

2.
Why The Workers Were Angry

WORKERS IN B.C. have been frustrated by years of Social Credit cutback programs. But the fightback over the past few years has been relatively weak. This isn't unique to B.C. — throughout the industrial world, working class militancy has been dampened by years of record level unemployment and plummetting real incomes.

But in B.C., there was something more contributing to the lack of militancy in recent years. The Socred government had grown quite

unpopular, and in labour circles, particularly in the public sector, there was a widespread belief that the New Democratic Party (NDP) was sure to win the election on May 5, 1983. In the hope that an NDP government would be open to friendlier negotiations, many public sector unions accepted cutbacks without organising a fightback, and stalled on contract negotiations instead of striking.

During the campaign, however, NDP strategists developed the theory that the election would be won or lost on the votes of about 5 per cent of the electorate, which hadn't made up its mind either way. In a play for this vote, the NDP made an effort to look as conservative as the Socreds, on the assumption that they couldn't alienate their usual voters, since they had nowhere else to go. The result was that they completely failed to present a recognisable alternative, and lost the election, 49 per cent to 45 per cent.

The Socred government was the first provincial government to introduce wage controls for civil servants, under the doublespeak title of Compensation Stabilisation. A major part of the Socred campaign was the argument that the NDP would destroy the Compensation Stabilisation Commission (CSB) and that wage settlements with public sector workers would go through the roof.

To counter this argument, the NDP announced during the campaign that the CSB would not be dismantled immediately after the election, and even that the Commissioner, the notorious Ed Peck, would not be fired. NDP leader Dave Barrett went so far as to boast in the daily papers one week before the election that he would be tougher on the labour movement than the Socreds. "Let's face it, I've been premier before and if I go back again, I don't want people to think it's going to be miracle time. It's going to be tougher getting wage increases with us than it was with Peck." So why vote NDP?

Bennett chose to interpret his narrow election victory as "a mandate for restraint". On July 7, 1983, the Socreds introduced some 30 bills and a seemingly endless list of policy directives which can only be described as an all-out attack on the rights and benefits of the working class of British Columbia. Some highlights:

Bills 2 and 3 — These bills were designed to make it easier for the Socreds to achieve their aim of reducing the civil service by 25 per cent. Key sections of the bills made it possible to dismiss public employees without regard to seniority or "just cause". Before negotiations began, the government changed the bill slightly to require "just cause" for firing, but stated that in future, shortage of funding for salaries would be considered just cause for dismissal. The first obvious target of these bills was the BCGEU, whose contract came up November 1.

Bill 5 — This bill immediately abolished all rent controls, which had been established by the NDP more than 10 years previously. Across the province, thousands of tenants immediately received notices of rent increases, some of them more than 100 per cent. Another section of the bill gave landlords the right to evict tenants, again without the legal requirement of providing just cause. In addition, the Rentalsman's office will be permanently closed, leaving tenants with no recourse to settle disputes with landlords except through the courts, at a potential cost of thousands of dollars.

Bill 6 — Bill 6 gives extraordinary powers to the minister of education to administer school budgets. In effect, the minister can now force school boards to lay off large numbers of teachers by chopping their budgets. University budgets have been slashed, the concept of tenure has been undermined, and tuition fees have shot up more than 30 per cent. Student grants have been eliminated completely — while government subsidies to exclusive private schools have been *increased* by 12 per cent.

Bill 27 — The Human Rights Act abolishes the Human Rights Branch and the Human Rights Commission, and replaces them with a five member Socred appointed Human Rights Council, which on its own is supposed to handle all the complaints formerly dealt with by the other two bodies. All future complainants will have to prove with evidence the intent of the company or landlord to discriminate before their case will be heard. Of course, hard evidence is usually next to impossible for a complainant to obtain. In addition, Bill 27 erases the section of the Human Rights Code which prohibited publication of discriminating employment ads, and made it illegal to require an applicant to furnish information regarding race, religion, or political beliefs.

At the same time, the government set out to re-emphasize its committment to private enterprise by selling out government departments which had turned a profit in recent years. Pacific Coach Lines was sold to a prominent Socred backroom organizer at an undisclosed price, while *Beautiful B.C.* magazine was sold to millionaire car salesman Jim Pattison. Jim Pattison runs a magazine distribution company which puts out some of the most violent pornography available in Canada, including magazines featuring rape, murder and humiliation of women and children. One magazine, *Family Affairs*, deals exclusively with incest. Jim Pattison is perhaps best known for the fat job he pulled down as director of construction for Expo '86.

It is no exaggeration to state that these bills and the dozens of cutback directives which followed them have affected the lives of almost every working class person in B.C. People were shocked by the pettiness and vindictiveness of some of the cuts — for instance, many well-known opponents of the Socred government, such as the Vancouver Status of Women, were singled out for special cutbacks, and the government even went so far as to eliminate a $50 per month grant to handicapped people who did volunteer work in the community, saving a few paltry thousand, while the Expo budget topped $1 billion.

Policies like these provoked the anger of hundreds of thousands of B.C.ers, and led to the formation of Solidarity. But Bennett's reaction to the mass protests was to call all those who opposed his policies "bad British Columbians", because they stood in the way of the province's economic recovery.

The Socreds carried out these vicious cuts in the name of "restraint". They claim people in this province have been living high off the hog too long, and have driven the province to the brink of economic disaster. In the last resort, they scream "but the money just isn't there!" Is this true?

3.
The Restraint Fraud

THE INTERNATIONAL economic system has been sliding deeper and deeper into recession since the mid-seventies, and even the most optimistic of economists sees no end in sight to high levels of unemployment, debt crisis in the less developed countries, soaring deficits and slow economic growth. The resource-based economy of British Columbia cannot escape this international crisis of capitalism, and it is a falsehood to talk about a B.C. economic "recovery" this side of a dramatic improvement in the global economy.

When the Socred government outlined its 1983 budget, it announced a $1.6-billion deficit. So large a deficit in a relatively small economy such as that of B.C. is indeed a serious matter, and it is no wonder that many British Colubmians supported the general idea of "restraint" in government spending.

As it turned out early in 1984, when the government published updated economic statistics, the deficit amounted to less than half that, or $700 million. But how did this deficit arise?

It might be expected that spending on social services has increased with so many people being forced to use emergency social services as a result of depressed economic conditions. But with the cuts in benefits and the elimination of so many services, spending on Human Resources actually *dropped* in 1984 as a percentage of total government spending. The real leaps in spending took place in two areas — interest on the B.C. debt, which rose 88 per cent over last year, and spending on megaprojects, under the auspices of a variety of government ministries and Crown Corporations, which leapt up 400 per cent in some areas, and over 700 per cent in others!

It is nothing short of a bald-faced lie to claim that the B.C. budget is about "restraint". Government spending actually increased in 1983/1984 by 12.3 per cent. What the budget really does is transfer funds that could have gone to social services into megaprojects cush as the Revelstoke Dam, Northeast Coal, B.C. Rail expansion, B.C. Place and Expo '86, and the ALRT rapid transit system in Vancouver, to name but a few.

The Social Credit cabinet, following advice from the far-right economic think-tank, the Fraser Institute, believes that the key to economic recovery in B.C. lies in attracting foreign investment to the province. They have developed a three-sided strategy in their drive to create "a good investment climate"; 1) break the defenses of the trade unions and drive down workers' wages and benefits; 2) Eliminate restrictions on the abilities of large corporations to make large profits, by giving them tax breaks, abolishing regulatory agencies, setting up "free trade zones" and "free banking zones", and even giving straight up donations to high-tech and other firms; 3) funding huge megaprojects designed to make resource extraction easier. All of the recent Socred legislation can be traced back directly or indirectly to this strategy. What is Expo '86 but a big Disneyland for international businessman, designed to attract their investments?

The Fraser Institute's Michael Walker said he was "exhilirated" by the Socred measures, and called them "a new vision of the future". But many economists, even those not known for their sympathy to labour, don't believe the strategy will work.

The Conference Board of Canada, a big business-funded and oriented economic institute, has pointed out that driving people into poverty may make it cheaper for a corporation to hire labour, but it also means that people have much less money to spend. Consumer spending makes up about two-thirds of total economic activity, and when people buy fewer cars, houses, appliances and services, the economy suffers rather than benefits. Wages in B.C. will never fall as low as wages in Asia, Latin America and elsewhere — the cost of living here is just too high. Therefore, the Conference Board concludes that the logic of Socred "restraint" will actually slow down any economic recovery in B.C.

The B.C. Economic Policy Institute, a group of University of British Columbia economists, agrees that trying to reduce the real incomes of working people will do more harm than good, and also points out that the real root of the budget problems of the B.C. government lies with overspending on unprofitable megaprojects. Gideon Rosenbluth, a member of the Institute has stated that "the last two budgets are trying to make welfare recipients pay for the government's ... dubious, unsound investment projects." (*Western News*, 9/5/84)

Expo '86 is the big carrot dangling in front of our eyes at the moment. If you can hang on until 1986, so they tell us, it will all be milk and honey, right? Not necessarily. The World's Fair in New Orleans was promised to turn a profit by its organisers, but wound up a nightmare of debt and poor attendance. The only certain thing about Expo '86 is that it will cost $1.2 billion or more. B.C. Place is sitting idle because of a shortage of money to resume construction, while the interest on the B.C. Place debt alone piles up at a rate of $680,000 *per month*! Expo '86 may make a few non-union contractors a fortune, and it may create a few short-term jobs selling hamburgers to tourists, but it will do nothing to solve the underlying economic crisis, let alone create new social services.

The Revelstoke Dam is just one of B.C. Hydro's expensive megaprojects, and is another good example of the Socred obsession with huge capital outlays of dubious economic merit. It will cost $2 billion — yet according to the *Globe and Mail* (26/9/83), "the entire capacity will be surplus".

The Vancouver ALRT rapid transit system is an engineering marvel, and will surely impress the visiting businessmen during Expo '86, if they bother to get out of their limos long enough to take a ride. The ALRT will cost between $1 and $2 billion to construct, and an additional $1.6 billion to cover the interest on the loan it took to build it. The huge operating costs of the system will amount to over $6 per person per ride — and the difference between that cost and the current fare of 85¢ per ride will have to be made up by you and I.

But the classic megaproject black hole is B.C. Rail and Northeast Coal.

Over $3 billion has been spent so far to subsidise coal extraction, at an estimated cost of over $400,000 per job created.

In March, 1984, the Socreds borrowed $470 million to pay off the long-term debt of B.C. Rail, a debt that wasn't due until 2005. The payment enabled them to later sell shares in one profitable department of B.C. Rail — and leave the taxpayer to carry the rest. At the same time as the government paid this $470 million, they cut back welfare benefits from $25 to $90 per recipient, saving a grand total of $31 million, cut public school spending by $42 million, cut university spending by 5 per cent and eliminated grants to poor students "saving" less than $50 million. It's not hard to figure out where Socred priorities lie.

The Socreds moan about "losing money" on taxes spent on social services. But they have no qualms about losing fortunes on their pet mega projects. Northeast Coal hasn't a snowball's chance in hell of paying off — world coal prices are about $70 per ton and falling, while just to break even, the development needs to bring in about $110 per ton. World demand is so low that in 1984 cutbacks in Japanese coal imports have resulted in a loss of revenue of over $50 million to existing B.C. coal mines, and a resulting layoff of hundreds of miners. No wonder a *Province* headline (21/09/83) announced on the business page with amazement; "Coal mines opening as forecast predicts closures."

Northeast Coal is the highest priced on the world market, it costs the most to extract, and the brokers Midland Doherty have pointed out in a special study commissioned by the government that the project, which has already cost $3 billion, will steadily lose another $1 billion during its first seven years of operation.

The bottom line on Socred "restraint" is that the B.C. debt racked up on these dubious megaprojects stands at $16 billion, or 33 per cent of gross provincial product. The interest on this debt is estimated at $120 million *per month.* The combined per capita debt in B.C. stands at $5,748 per person, while the total "savings" from social service cutbacks amounts to only $16 per person.

Certainly, some large corporations in mining and construction have reaped benefits from some of the megaprojects. But money spent in health care and education creates three times as many jobs per dollar spent as do the megaprojects, and the "trickle-down effect" that the Socreds talk so much about is much greater in these areas.

Furthermore, there is absolutely no guarantee that the megaprojects will either create long-term jobs, attract investors, stimulate the private sector, or even pay for themselves in the long run. There's no evidence that they have helped the B.C. economy so far — B.C. has one of the highest per capita debts, and the third largest unemployment rate of any province or state in North America.

The megaproject-mania of the Socreds will do nothing to solve B.C.'s economic mess. Bennett is merely obeying the dictates of a world capitalist system that demands a diversion of wealth from wages and social services to the needs of capital investment. Capitalism is in crisis, and to defend their world of production-for-profit, capitalists in business and government will try to squeeze every penny they can out of working people. The result, however, will not free B.C. from the international economic crisis, it will only intensify the poor living and working conditions of B.C. workers.

But let's be clear — even if monies were diverted from megaprojects to social services, the underlying economic crisis would remain. The fundamental problem is a system that is based on profit, not the particular way that system chooses to divide the wealth it creates. In opposing the attacks on social services, it is important to have no illusions that a simple diversion of wealth from the megaprojects to social services will in itself solve the problems of working people. To *really* solve the economic crisis of B.C. and the rest of the world, a fundamental attack must be organised on the whole system of production-for-profit. We must replace it with a system based on production for human need, that is, with real socialism. But showing just how ludicrous the "recovery through megaproject" argument is, is important in exposing the lie behind Socred economic policies.

The developments in the world economic system force governments to take a more active role in economic life, so that more than ever before, the state and the economy are inseparably intertwined. This means, first, that the government is much more likely to use political measures to achieve economic goals and; secondly, that working people who are fighting to defend their rights and benefits find they must sooner or later go beyond their particular employer and take on the government.

It is patently obvious that the Socred government measures were more than simply an employer-employee dispute, as Art Kube and others repeatedly insisted, and amounted instead to a political attack on all working people. Operation Solidarity refused to regard itself as a political opposition outside of the legislature — and that was its downfall.

SOURCES: B.C. Budget, Globe and Mail, Vancouver Sun, Province, Solidarity Times, B.C. Central Credit Union Newsletter (Vol. 3; No. 4), "The Provincial Debt. — Restraint and Reality" by Chris Theoharis.

4.
The Solidarity — And The Sellout

THE MILITANCY and solidarity with which the working people of British Columbia responded to the Socred budget astounded the union brass, struck fear into the hearts of employers and the government, and inspired workers all across North America. As the local media revealed details of the "restraint" package of July 7, in union halls and church basements, through almost daily rallies and demonstrations, a huge groundswell of opposition formed and grew.

Within a week, the Lower Mainland Anti-budget Coalition was created from a variety of existing parties, groups and committees, and became a

magnet for people looking for a way to mount a fightback. The Executive Council of the B.C. Federation of Labour responded to the budget and the growing anti-budget movement by forming a coalition of trade unions, most in the public sector. It was named Operation Solidarity, with a respectful nod to the Polish trade union movement, and shortly thereafter, the Anti-Budget Coalition changed its name to the Solidarity Coalition. Soon every major city and town in B.C. had its two affiliates, and before the movement was squashed, Operation Solidarity and the Solidarity Coalition together comprised organisations representing over a million British Columbians.

Operation Solidarity remained under the strict control of its Steering Committee, which was composed of a small group of full-time union officials accountable to no one but each other. From its highest levels right down to individual union locals far from headquarters, Operation Solidarity was led and organised by existing officials using the existing union "machinery". The Solidarity Coalition, on the other hand was a very diverse organisation, and reflected far more quickly and democratically the militancy or demoralisation of its member organisations.

Right from the beginning there appeared a marked difference in the focus of protest of the two different organisations. Whereas the Solidarity Coalition expressed blanket opposition to the cutback legislation and the mass layoffs, Operation Solidarity appeared much more concerned that if layoffs and cuts were to be imposed, that they happen with respect to "due process" — i.e. that layoffs would take place according to seniority and cuts would only happen after a process of "meaningful consultation". What irritated Kube and Co. most about the Bennett measures was the apparent willingness of the Socreds to trample on the time-honoured tradition of imposing cutbacks and layoffs according to the rules which recognise the right of the union brass to assist in administering government policy. In other words, the labour leaders wanted to ensure their own position as middlemen between the corporations and the government on the one hand, and the workers of B.C. on the other. From Day One, Operation Solidarity was more concerned with defending the rights of the trade union bureaucracy than with defending the general interests of the workers of B.C.

Operation Solidarity expressed all the verbal support in the world for the Solidarity Coalition and its fight against the legislation on education cuts, human rights, tenant's rights, and social benefits cuts, but behind closed doors it made a clear decision that such support would never extend to job action. The Steering Committee set as its goal the signing of a contract between the BCGEU and the government, and more specifically a formula for applying the principles of seniority to mass public sector layoffs of more than 25 per cent of the workforce. Having set its sights so low, it isn't surprising that most of the Operation Solidarity leadership regarded the Kelowna agrement as a victory.

But the potential within the Solidarity movement was much greater. Norman Spector, chief negotiator for the government and right-hand man of Bill Bennett, believed at one point that Solidarity would not stop until it

overthrew the government and reversed all of the legislation. At times the momentum of the movement seemed irresistable.

On July 23, 30,000 people marched and rallied at B.C. Place. On July 27, 20,000 people, mostly civil servants on a walkout, demonstrated at the legislature in Victoria, the largest political protest ever held in that city. On August 10, 50,000 people filled Empire Stadium in Vancouver, in the most impressive display of opposition to that point. The Vancouver rally and similar actions in Prince George, Nanaimo, Courtenay, Kelowna, Fort Nelson and other towns, amounted to partial general strikes, since they took place during working hours, and many left work to attend them, as part of a so-called "political protest."

There then occured a frustrating interlude in which Solidarity bureaucrats, perhaps feeling they had flexed their muscles enought, attempted to negotiate with a very intransigent Socred government. There is a sound argument that August 10 could have successfully been organised as the first day of an all-out general strike — many workplaces saw a 90 per cent walkout on this unofficial action. Certainly the two months after August 10 spent in fruitless posturing and an exhausting petition campaign did nothing to build up workers' militancy.

During these two months, the Operation Solidarity Strategy Committee did literally everything possible to achieve a negotiated settlement and head off a confrontation. Art Kube was interviewed almost daily in the media, and without exception repeated that a strike "was something neither side wanted", and that a general strike was a "worst case scenario". In short, right up to mid-October, the trade union leadership did not prepare its membership for the tough battle which lay ahead, but instead did what it could to dampen militancy while it flailed about looking for a negotiated solution.

During this period, had the government made even small concessions on the BCGEU contract, the November strike would likely have been averted. However, the Socreds counted (as usual) on general labour demoralisation and refused to budge. Under mounting pressure from lower level union organisations (the Vancouver Trades and Labour council, for instance, voted in favour of an all-out general strike in October) and the Solidarity Coalition, the Operation Solidarity leadership was forced to work out a "plan of action".

On October 15, more than 70,000 people marched past the luxury hotel where the Social Credit Party was holding its annual convention.

The march took some six hours to pass any given point. On the back of such a massive display of support, Operation Solidarity announced its strike plans — but they did not include a general strike.

Instead, the BCGEU would walk out on November 1, to be followed at intervals of four to seven days by other groups of public employees. It was explained that the staged escalation of the strike would put increasing pressure on the government to negotiate an end to the strike. What it actually did was put increasing pressure on the rank and file of the BCGEU, who by the end of the strike had been on strike pay for two weeks, while other workers hadn't yet walked out.

On November 1, the BCGEU strike came off solidly as expected. But there was greater fear among activists that the next escalation, a teachers' walkout set for November 8, would not take place, and that the strike would collapse. The teachers were regarded as the weak link in the chain of public sector unions. In their first strike vote ever, only 59 per cent had supported strike action, and Minister of Education Jack Heinrich had threatened that any teachers who walked off faced the withdrawal of their teaching certificates.

It seems clear that the strategy of staged escalation of the strike was put together by the Strategy Committee to provide themselves with a ready-made means of backing off when things got too hot. It is probable that the teachers were chosen to go out ahead of several other more militant sections of workers so that the bureaucrats could pull out without losing face. Larry Kuehn, head of the B.C. Teachers' Federation, has written that "Neither Kube nor Munro wanted the 'general strike' which might eventually be set off if an escalation of the public sector strikes began, and both were prepared to go to great lengths to ensure that there was a settlement." However, despite the threats and with the help of pickets from dozens of unions, 90 per cent of all schools were shut down on November 8.

That same day, Art Kube was interviewed for CBCTV in front of a closed school. His face was a picture of anguish and despair. He said; "I've always tried to play the role of peacemaker ... and now it's come to this!" At that point, Kube broke down sobbing before the camera.

In the evening, Kube was scheduled to speak before a solidarity meeting in New Westminster. The mood of the audience was positive and confident after the remarkable success of the teachers' walkout. The feeling was that the strike was moving from strength to strength, and that the government was on the defensive.

But Art Kube didn't share the mood. He got no more than a few words into his prepared speech before once more breaking down and weeping openly. In between sobs, he apologized to the crowd for allowing the strike to get to that point, and moaned that the government had refused to budge or bargain, and left no room for compromise.

The audience sat back, somewhat stunned at this rare glimpse into the soul of the union bureaucrat. For a moment, they were witness not only to the inner contradictions and emotional turmoil of Art Kube, but to the dilemma in the hearts of the whole Operation Solidarity leadership. To the professional negotiator, open conflict can only be experienced as tragedy, since it means that the negotiation process has failed. When the familiar and reassuring rituals of bargaining and compromise disintegrate, while at the same time the battle rages and grows more intense, it can be very traumatic — it is as if the structure of the known universe is unravelling. The priority becomes not to fight on to victory, but to re-establish at any cost the "avenues of communication".

The next day, Kube was granted a leave of absence as head of Operation Solidarity, suffering from what was called "flu", but could be more accurately be described as a nervous breakdown. Kube was replaced by Mike Kramer, a career bureaucrat who had played no role whatsoever in the mobilisation. The stage was set for the Kelowna accord.

5.
Why Do Union Bureaucrats Always Sell Out?

AT EVERY STAGE of the Solidarity movement, the upper level trade union leadership, specifically the Operation Solidarity Strategy Committee: sought to dampen militancy rather than channel it into a united struggle against the Socreds; prevented any democratic rank and file influence on Committee decisions regarding either the demands being fought for or the terms of the settlement; sought negotiation and avoided confrontation; when forced to fight, chose the soft option (i.e. a staged escalation rather than a general strike).

The Kelowna agreement which ended the November strike left many thousands of activists bitterly disappointed. The common response was to blame individual labour leaders, especially Jack Munro, for the sellout. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that Munro was willing to forget about the teachers' demands for the sake of a quick agreement.

But, without apologizing for Munro, it would be hard to dump all the blame for what was a collective decision onto his back. It is true that the final agreement was worked out behind closed doors with Munro and Kramer. But once the dirty deal was struck, some 25 members of the Operation Solidarity Steering Committee, including the top leadership of the largest trade unions in the province, voted unanimously to call off the strike.

The Solidarity movement swept up the workers of B.C. in a way most had never experienced. But the pattern of both the movement and the sellout are as old as capitalism and the trade union movement themselves. From the British General Strike of 1926, to France in May of 1968, to Poland in 1981, not to mention countless lesser conflicts in between, mass movements of workers have been negotiated and compromised to death by trade union officials. Any explanation of what happened to Solidarity in B.C. has to go beyond the individual personalities of the particular bureaucrats involved this time, however disgusting they might be, and try to dig out the deeper pattern.

How do the full-time union officials who control the unions sometimes get so out of touch with the concerns and aspirations of the ordinary rank and file militant that it appears as though they are fighting for completely different goals? First, as is well known, the average full-time official leads a far different lifestyle than that of the people they are supposed to represent. This is doubly true of the bureaucrat at the level of the Strategy Committee.

Most full-time union officials are *career* bureaucrats, and haven't worked at the trade they represent for years, if they ever did! Jack Munro, for instance, last did manual labour as a welder in 1961, and even before that was a union official in the Machinists' Union. Bob White, head of the Canadian United Auto Workers, has been an official since 1959. Art Kube, learned his stuff in Austria, where he was involved in the violent battles

between the Social Democrats and the Communists over control of the union movement in the early '50s. He walked straight into full-time unionism in Canada as, in his words, "a steel heavy" for the United Steelworkers in their drive to destroy the leftish Mine, Mill and Smelter workers in Sudbury.

Full-timers may receive two or three times the salary of the workers they represent, and they never suffer the threat of layoff, industrial accidents, or speed-up. Jack Munro receives a salary of over $50,000 per year plus expenses, and he has been praised for his self-restraint — others receive far more. For many shop-floor militants, a career in the union bureaucracy can seem like the only way out of a dead-end job — but as bureaucrats like Munro build a career, it becomes easier and easier for them to forget that workers are profoundly affected by more than just the simple bread and butter issues on the traditional negotiating table. Jack Munro lives in exclusive West Vancouver, where his next-door neighbor and close personal friend is a former Lieutenant General of British Columbia — so how can he get terribly excited about the abolition of rent controls?

Art Kube told a familiar story on a recent television interview. "I find it very strange," he explained, "that although I was raised by a single parent mother in poverty and worked (from the time I was 13), it wasn't until the development of the Solidarity movement that I realized how far from my own background I had come. Then I realized that the leadership of the trade union movement enjoys middle-class incomes, lives in middle-class houses in middle-class neighborhoods. And then we started to think this way. I am glad that the Solidarity movement has shown us how the working class really lives and what it is. And I, for one, don't ever again intend to forget it." Sure, Art.

The way people live and the way they work determines the way they think and the way they act. The day-to-day worklife of the full-time union bureaucrat, quite apart from their middle-class home-lives, is one of three-piece suits and fancy hotels, business lunches and boardrooms, arguments over sticky legal interpretations of contract language, ceaseless negotiation and compromise, and the eternal search for the perfect agreement in which no one wins and no one loses, but above all else the framework for continued negotiation is maintained.

This whole process not only shapes the way the bureaucrat thinks, but attracts the sort of potential bureaucrat who already thinks that way. The job of professional negotiator requires a level of "expertise" which is usually beyond that of the ordinary worker, and the trend has been to appoint individuals with backgrounds in union politics or law. For example, the new national president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Jeff Rose, is a graduate of the London School of Economics. And behind every Jeff Rose stands a multitude of non-elected researchers and technical staff who never so much as lay eyes on the average trade unionist they "serve".

The distance this type of organising creates between the bureaucracy of a union and its membership produces a number of effects which are not always beneficial to the average trade unionist. One of the first and most noticeable is that the full-timer begins to develop an unhealthy contempt for the rank and file worker as an unwashed slob who is barely capable of understanding the contract, and who is always creating headaches through minor infringements and petty grievances.

Some union bureaucrats start off as careerist ass-kissers right from the start. But many begin as good rank and file militants and only move into the bureaucracy out of frustration and defeat on the shop floor or in the typing pool. Often, they begin by trying to motivate their workmates to action over some issue, only to conclude from failure that there is something 'wrong' with the people around them — "They don't understand; they don't care", etc. Frequently, such activists simply withdraw into cynicism. But some of them conclude that their failure can be rectified by climbing up the union ladder. In that way they will gain enough power to push through the things they want to see pushed, and to compel their fellow workers to act on issues they believe require action.

Before long these low level union officials begin to believe that they know better than anyone else what's best for the union member, and soon fall into the habit of relying on their own judgement instead of trying to build up the militancy of their workmates. From there it's just a step and a hop before they see themselves as generals in the field, and rank and file workers as mere soldiers to be ordered about. By the time they've reached any sort of secure position in the union apparatus, they identify more with the actual organisation and specific interests of the trade union machine than with the average trade unionist, and as often as not see workers as potential obstacles to the smooth running of negotiations, grievance procedures, arbitrations, and other daily routines.

Meanwhile, the rank and file workers live in the real world of economic ups and downs, and the system of negotiation and legal contracts being what it is, militancy and combativity can change dramatically from one week to the next. When the union is isolated and the members are intimidated by layoffs and economic hardship, the conditions are right for the election of a conservative official who is afraid of confrontation. But the mood of the membership may leap far beyond the militancy of its leadership during times of conflict such as we've seen in the Solidarity movement.

Unfortunately faced with a sudden upsurge in rank and file militancy, the career bureaucrat commonly falls into the mental habit, developed over years and decades, of believing that they and only they are in tune with "reality" and only they can objectively decide what is in the best interests of the rank and file. Years of rubbing elbows with employers and government negotiators has made them more sympathetic to the problems and concerns of the "other side", and their priority becomes how to work out a "reasonable solution" to the conflict and then shove it down the throats of the rank and file.

For instance, Art Kube has made it clear that while he talked tough to the media to improve his bargaining position, he actually believed that a general strike was against the best interests of working people, since it would hurt the economy. So behind the scenes he did what he could to head off a general strike and come up with a negotiated settlement. Many

rank and file militants might have argued that the best thing for the economy would have been to get rid of the Socred government and its megaproject spending sprees through a short, sharp, all-out general strike — but they never got the chance to make that argument, because Art Kube and company made sure that Operation Solidarity was not subject to democratic pressure from below.

In an effort to insulate themselves against shifting moods of militancy in the rank and file, and to protect their freedom to maneuver, the bureaucrats erect all sorts of barriers between themselves and the membership. In most unions it is next to impossible to directly confront the President or the negotiating committee except during tightly controlled mass meetings. In many unions, the leadership is not nominated by the rank and file, but the the bureaucracy itself, and is elected not directly by the membership but by a delegate conference composed of lower level bureaucrats. In some unions it is next to impossible and even illegal to try to mount an opposition campaign to overturn the established leadership. Given this form of organisation, it is easy and even necessary to fall into influence peddling, electioneering, and even downright rigging of elections. But the higher up the union ladder you go, the less important elections become, since most top level union bureaucrats make most of their decisions without even a minimum of democratic input, and are accountable only to committees of other bureaucrats like themselves.

The only reason the members of the Operation Solidarity Strategy Committee were able to railroad the sellout through, and were later able to promise a general strike to the B.C. Federation of Labour convention delegates and then just not put it together, is that they knew there was no existing mechanism for the rank and file unionists to organise and vote them out. If they had been subject to direct democratic control they'd have gotten the boot long ago.

When Solidarity in Poland was born, all negotiations with the government were broadcast live on loudspeakers, and later on radio and T.V. When Solidarity in B.C. was formed, CO-OP radio offered to broadcast live all negotiations with the government — but Operation Solidarity, *not the Socreds*, refused. Many career bureaucrats will openly admit that they cannot afford democratic controls such as open negotiations and immediate recall of negotiators, because that might "damage their credibility with the employer". The employer wants to hammer out a deal with one representative, and that negotiator doesn't want the rank and file to get in the way of whatever deal they might come up with.

Jack Munro was chosen by the Strategy Committee to visit Bill Bennett at his home, because as they explained, Munro had had discussions with Bennett before, and had established a "relationship" with the Premier. These "relationships" can be all-important to the professional negotiator, because whatever the state of labour relations at a given time, tomorrow is another day and another set of negotiations and above all else; the mutual respect and even trust between the two sides must be maintained. But with these relationships inevitably come secret trade-offs, hidden agendas, and under the table handshakes — deals which must be kept out of sight of the

rank and file if negotiations are to continue.

If an intransigent militant who won't back down and play the game is put in charge of negotiations, the employers will very soon refuse to deal with them, and will turn to lockouts or even more drastic measures to put pressure on. This is one way the employers can "elect" the union negotiator.

Full-time union officials are caught between a rock and a hard place. They must work out a compromise between two interests which are ultimately irreconciliable. On the one hand, they must be prepared to lead workers into strike votes and other shows of militancy, or if necessary to place themselves at the head of a rank and file protest (if only to ride it out), in order to extract concessions from the employers. On the other hand, the bureaucrat lives in mortal fear of "going too far" and provoking a breakdown in negotiations, a lockout, legal action or anti-union legislation, a decertification drive, or even mass firings such as with the Air Traffic Controllers across the U.S., or McDonnel Douglas in California. This is why union officials will often fight harder to prevent a strike, especially an illegal strike, than the employer does — from the point of view of the bureaucrat, every conflict is a failure, since it means the negotiation process has failed.

Indeed, it sometimes appears to the bureaucrat that the only thing that stands between the union and extinction is the almighty Contract and The Law. In order to persuade the employer to sign and respect a contract, they must provide the guarantee that the workforce will be quiet and productive, and above all, will not break the collective agreement. If the union can't control the workforce, why should the employer bargain with it?

Partly because of this, and partly because the existing grievance and arbitration procedure keeps their role of central importance, many union leaders develop a near obsession with maintaining legality and the letter of the law. They appear to believe that if they keep their noses clean and play by the rules, so will the other side. But what happens when the other side makes the rules?

Chief government negotiator Norman Spector has said he believed that Solidarity would overthrow the government. He changed his mind, however, when he saw how quickly it accepted an injunction against picketing the Vancouver Law Courts. The injunction was ordered by one judge, Chief Justice Allen McEachern, in a fit of irritation at having to cross a picket line on his way to work. If Operation Solidarity reacted so meekly to an order signed by just one man on his own authority, Spector reasoned, it would never be so bold as to challenge government authority.

The depth of this obsession with legality became more evident later in the Solidarity strike, when it became clear that to increase pressure on the government, Solidarity would be forced to move increasingly into "illegal" actions and strikes, and that as they did so, the government grew less and less inclined to negotiate at all. Mike Kramer has stated that his major consideration in stopping the strike was not that militancy was weakening, but that he feared fines imposed by the government on the unions for

breaking injunctions would bleed union treasuries dry. Here again, Kramer put the survival of the union machinery above the interests of the rank and file.

But a united workers' movement need never fear anything as petty as fines, especially before fines are even imposed. In Quebec, the government was forced to drop huge fines imposed on striking teachers out of fear of provoking even greater unrest. What Kramer is really saying is that the choice was between halting the struggle and returning to the cozy and familiar negotiating table, or going for broke and trying to bring the government down. Any halfway measures could only result in defeat.

Openly working to bring down a government outside the established parliamentary procedures, however, is very illegal, and also destroys the all-important negotiating "relationship". Hence the other aspect of the union bureaucracy's obsession with legality — its tireless work to get social democratic parties like the NDP elected. If they are unable to confront the existing government out of fear of its legislative powers, their only option is to work to get another, more sympathetic government elected, which will hopefully enact "progressive" legislation. When the B.C. Fed. convention met in November, 1983, on the heels of the Solidarity defeat and in the middle of fresh government attacks on the labour movement, the best the Executive Council could come up with as a Plan of Action was an education campaign designed to get the NDP elected four years later.

According to Jim Hewitt, Socred Minister of Consumer Affairs, Jack Munro entered the negotiations "because the private sector unions were fed up with the Solidarity nonsense and wanted to put a stop to it." Both Kube and Kramer have stated several times that they acted to stop the strike "because it was time for someone to show some responsibility before things went too far." Larry Kuehn has written; "The motivation for calling off the action are complex and varied, but can best be characterized by saying that all involved thought that they were acting 'responsibly' both for the labour movement and for the society". Art Kube, when asked why he didn't push for the strike to continue until the government was brought down, replied "'It can't happen in Canada that a labour movement can bring down a government.'" Munro has also said, "We can't allow a government to be overthrown by a general strike in this country."

The sense of "responsibility" shown by these labour "leaders" will no doubt be appreciated by the government and the employers at the next round of negotiations, or perhaps even when it comes time to appoint senators, commissioners, or ministerial consultants. Jack Munro has reportedly already turned down several positions in "private industry", as well as a Liberal nomination in the last federal election. But it is clear that the responsibility they feel is to the whole corrupt system of negotiation and compromise which produced them, and not to the interests of their members, or to the working class of British Columbia.

Trade unions are extremely important organisations for the defense of the living standards of working people. In them, workers are taught the basics of class solidarity, fighting for their rights, and collective,

democratic self-activity. But capitalism bends and corrupts and uses every aspect of human activity for its own purposes. Trade unions were created to fight the exploitation of working people, yet in practice they only regulate the worse aspects of it, and in the end, institutionalize exploitation and put a "fair" price on it. Any individual, however militant he or she may have been in the past, who is able to build a career in the trade union bureaucracy, is inevitably changed by the process and becomes incapable of leading any struggle which could seriously threaten the powers of the employers or the system of government. That is why the Solidarity movement could only have succeeded if it were *led* by rank and file workers *in opposition* to the established trade union leadership.

6.
What Was Needed — A Rank And File Movement

EVERY UNION HAS full time officials who do nothing but take care of union business all day long. Many union members who actually work in the offices, factories, and other workplaces have never met these fulltimers, and have only a dim idea of what they are up to.

But every workplace has a local leadership — a group of people who keep morale up, stick up for other workers against management, file the grievances, organise job actions or picketing, organise for demonstrations, and so on — and everyone in that workplace knows who they are. They may hold positions in the union, such as shop steward, or even be on the Local's executive, but they haven't been sucked into the full time union machinery — they work side by side with their brothers and sisters and are in constant contact with the daily concerns of the membership. These people are the rank and file leadership, and without them no strike or protest movement can get off the ground.

During the Solidarity movement's buildup, an extraordinary number of people were stimulated to action out of anger at the Socreds, and many took on the task of organising the fightback in their own workplaces and neighbourhoods. The demonstrations, the mass rallies, and especially the walkouts on July 27 and August 10, and the November strike itself, did not happen because they were ordered from on high by the Kubes and Munros. They happened because the rank and file leadership, in their tens of thousands, organised them at the grassroots level.

It was the rank and file militants who put out the greatest effort in the months of organisation leading up to the Solidarity strike. It was they who ensured the success of the teachers' walkout by bolstering picket lines at schools at a critical point in the strike. And it was they who lost most to the Kelowna sellout. Most of these activists believed they were fighting for greater aims than merely the establishment of seniority rights for one union. Today, their bitter disappointment has largely turned into demoralisation, apathy, and inactivity.

More than any others, it was these rank and file militants who had the power to propel the movement forward or channel it into a different direction from that which it took. Yet they were excluded from democratic participation in all the important decisions taken by Operation Solidarity, because the bureaucratic organisation of the union movement is a one-way conveyor belt taking orders from on high down to the "foot soldiers" at the workplace level.

What was needed above all in the Solidarity movement was an independent organisation of rank and file militants which could get around the union communication machinery and provide an alternative leadership to the Operation Solidarity Strategy Committee. Certainly there were more than enough people who saw the sellout coming to work effectively on building such an alternative. By forming local groups in individual workplaces and leafletting demos, rallies, and other workplaces, a "Rank and File Solidarity" could have linked up workers in different unions and non-union workplaces, in the public and private sectors, and in community organisations, and given them a common set of demands to fight for.

One of the demands of government negotiators leading up to the strike was that Operation Solidarity formally dissociate itself from the Solidarity Coalition. It was their greatest fear that the strike would go beyond the containable demands of seniority rights and the BCGEU contract. Typically, the Operation Solidarity bureaucrats agreed to this, because, quite simply, it was the only route to a negotiated settlement. It is the greatest single failing of the Solidarity Coalition that they too accepted this artificial separation between union members and so-called "social issues" that are as important to union workers as to anyone else.

The Solidarity Coalition accepted this separation for a number of reasons, not least of which was that the Coalition was led by a number of well-known NDP supporters whose personal styles and convictions matched their counterparts in Operation Solidarity. But more importantly, especially for the typical activist in the Coalition, there was a firm and quite correct belief that only organised labour had the power to force the government to back down on its legislation, and that an alliance with labour had to be maintained at all costs, and an equally firm but quite incorrect belief that maintaining the alliance with organized labour meant accepting everything Operation Solidarity did or said without public criticism.

A Rank and File Solidarity could have broken down the divisions between the ordinary union member and the activists fighting in the community organisations for the "social issues". It could have put on pressure, through newsletters, leaflets, rallies and demonstrations, local union resolutions, press conferences and direct job actions, for open negotiations with the government, a democratically elected and instantly recallable negotiating team, the placing of social issues on the agenda, even at the right moment for demanding the resignation of the government. But it would have taken a very clear *political* perspective — a determination to build a political opposition outside of the traditional parliamentary channels and *in opposition to* the establsihed trade union bureaucracy.

7.
The NDP — Whose Side Are These Guys On, Anyway?

WHEN OPPOSITION to the budget and the bills began to mount after the election, the Socreds did their best to discredit the movement by spreading the idea that the whole thing was just stirred up by the NDP because they were "sore losers". Partly for this reason, as party strategist Dennis Cooke explained, the NDP made a conscious and serious effort to dissociate themselves, *as a party,* from the Solidarity movement, and especially from job actions such as the Nov. strike. NDP banners and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) were as rare as Socreds at some events.

Of course, many NDP members were active as *individuals* in Solidarity, and certainly NDP methods and politics flavoured the upper echelons of Operation Solidarity and the Solidarity Coalition. But when the BCGEU strike broke, and reporters frantically tried to get interviews with NDP leader Dave Barrett, he literally locked himself up in his home and refused to answer the door or telephone. When he finally did speak, he was careful not to support the strike action, and argued that nothing could be accomplished "on the streets". The best he could come up with was to denounce the Socreds for causing the whole "disruption". Other NDPers went so far as to state to the media that the Socreds weren't a good government because their "labour-management principles" were ineffective — in other words, an NDP government would have better control of the union movement.

The real reasons for the NDP's non-support of Solidarity should be clear to everyone. The NDP cannot afford to support anti-government and in some cases illegal strikes and rallies if it hopes some day to be managing the B.C. economy. The NDP demonstrated its policy on labour unrest when it was in power in 1975. At that time Premier Barrett legislated more than 50,000 workers back to work in the forestry and propane industries, supermarkets, and B.C. Rail. No wonder one BCGEU picketer, when hearing on the radio that the NDP would not officially support the strike, was heard to say, "Whose side are these guys on, anyway?"

There is an eternal principle in the Social Democratic tradition which holds that "politics" (i.e. parliament and government) and "economic struggles" (i.e. workers fighting their employers) must be rigidly separated. This is a very convenient principle for Social Democratic governments like the NDP when dealing with labour unrest. It was this principle which permitted lifelong social democrat Art Kube to state over and over that it wasn't the place of Operation Solidarity to be "political", that is, it couldn't fight for social issues, but had to stick to the fight for recognised contract issues like seniority rights, and leave everything else to the NDP. It was this principle that was embodied in the split between Operation Solidarity and the Solidarity Coalition.

The NDP is the "political" arm of the trade union bureaucracy, and

plays a similar role, but on the level of the legislature. That is to say, the NDP seeks to moderate the worst aspects of capitalist exploitation through progressive legislation, yet it is so wound up in the system itself that it is constitutionally incapable of ever leading a movement which could threaten it.

In October, the NDP sought to delay passage of the bills through a series of ridiculous procedural wrangles which resulted in Barrett's physical ejection from the legislature. Barrett later said that this ejection was his "finest hour", and that he had in his many years in office performed no greater service to the people of British Columbia. The sad thing is, he's right.

Because it sees the battlefield as being the legislature, and its warriors as the two dozen or so MLAs in the house, the NDP rendered itself almost completely irrelevant to the real struggles which were going on in the union halls, on the streets, and on the picket lines. They simply weren't there, and the rank and file didn't miss them. NDP member of Parliament Ian Waddell said that the Solidarity movement was "dangerous" because it discredited the Parliamentary process of government. In a sense, he's right — what the Solidarity movement did for many thousands of people was contrast in the sharpest way the collective strength of working people fighting for a better life with the buffoonery and fraud of the Legislative Assembly.

In the last analysis, the NDP, although officially tied to the trade union bureaucracy, proved itself even more suspicious than that bureaucracy of a mass movement of workers. The union bureaucracy is at least indirectly accountable to the membership, and when a rank and file upsurge in militancy occurs, they must either sit atop it and ride it out or be swept aside by it. The NDP, however, is so distant from the everyday experiences of working people, that it often seems its only real tie to the workers' movement is a moral and theoretical one —and as social democratic parties have shown again and again, when it comes to the crunch, these ties are very watery indeed.

Many sincere socialists who are fighting for a better society believe that the NDP can be reformed from within and turned into a party that will really fight for workers' rights. The NDP may have weak traditional links to organised labour, but it functions as nothing more than an electoral machine resuscitated every few years to help a few dozen lawyers, professors and bureaucrats win public office in the hope that they will do something to help working people. The vitality and potential of the Solidarity movement did nothing if not prove the ineffectiveness of the NDP and the parliamentary talk-shop.

Of course we must vote for the NDP at election time, as the only party that is not bound hand and foot to management and business interests. However, no matter how many NDP MLAs get elected, it does not change the fact that parliament does not have the power to seriously change society for the better and end the ills of capitalism. Parliament has no such power, and even less does the provincial legislature.

We are constantly told in the media that what makes "our" system so

great is that we live in a democracy, and the government we elect runs the country in the interests of the majority. It is true that we have the very important right to vote every four or five years for this or that party. But under capitalism, the right to vote ends at the workplace where the boss is a virtual dictator who tells us what we can and cannot do, and even has the power to lay us off or fire us and deprive us of our livelihood. Try to go to work tomorrow and tell management that because we live in a democracy, in future all decisions affecting workers there will be put to a vote, or even that all supervisors will be elected and subject to immediate recall — then we'll see where democracy begins and ends.

Furthermore, the banks and large corporations have the real power to make all the vital economic decisions without going to the people for a vote. If an elected government tries to interfere too much with the real rulers of society, it will find itself sitting atop a ruined economy, as the powers that be withdraw their investments and sabotage production and distribution.

Capitalism survives at least partly because it is able to convince working people that the separation between "politics" and "economic struggles", like the separation between "public property" and "private property", is right, fair and natural. Socialists who believe that getting the NDP elected will solve our economic mess, merely reinforce this illusion, and in the long run hold back and divert the militancy of working people.

Solidarity showed that there is a greatly different and far more effective way to fight oppression and exploitation than to simply vote NDP — and that is through the combativity and collective organisation of working people in struggle.

8.
The Socialist Alternative

THE SOLIDARITY movement united more workers in common struggle than had ever been seen in B.C. But workers' movements such as Solidarity are not rare and isolated events. As the international economic crisis deepens, working people from country to country are continuously creating opposition movements in defense of their rights and living standards. *Solidarnosc* in Poland was simply the largest recent example of what has become an increasingly familiar pattern.

Economic crisis forces governments to play a growing role in their national economies, propping up weak industries, stimulating growth through tax incentives, military spending, and so on, and increasingly using legislation to break unions, drive down wages, and reduce the "social wage" through social service cutbacks. Working people more and more are recognising that fighting for a better life means taking on not just a particular employer, but the government and the state.

This makes it harder and harder for the trade union bureaucracy to stick to simple bread and butter contract issues, and puts greater pressure on

them to take political actions such as mass demonstrations, one-day general strikes, and so on. As the economy goes into a tail-spin, they will tend to place even more emphasis on social democratic parties as an alternative to direct political action by mass workers' movements.

But, inevitably, such movements will spring up, not just in Europe or Latin America, but right here in Canada and British Columbia. And when they do, the trade union leadership will do what it can to defuse these movements and channel them into "safe" but ineffective dead ends such as tripartism or the NDP. In order to prevent a rerun of the Solidarity sellout, the basis for a rank and file organisation must be built *long before* the actual fightback erupts.

The International Socialists are a small group of trade unionists, students, unemployed people and other activists who are dedicated to building a rank and file alternative in Canada. We believe that oppression and exploitation, as well as the threats of economic depression, nuclear war, and ecological disaster that capitalism hangs over our heads, can only be stopped when working people collectively and democratically take over society.

No party or individual can hand freedom on a platter to working people. They must win it themselves through their own self-conscious struggles. There were a few socialist groups and figures to the left of the NDP who played a role in the Solidarity movement. However, because they did not understand the role of the trade union bureaucracy they were unable to see the sellout coming and are today unable to explain the Kelowna agreement except as a betrayal by a handful of cowardly or self-serving individuals. Their only alternative is to replace these individuals with others who are more militant. We believe, however, that the only possible road to victory for a workers' movement is to take decision-making powers out of the nads of the few and put it into the hands of the many.

Socialism does not exist anywhere in the world today. The bureaucratic, state-controlled societies like the USSR and China are not socialist, but state-capitalist. Workers in these societies, to a greater or lesser degree, face the same problems and fight back in more or less the same way as workers in western countries do — as Solidarity in Poland has proven.

Socialism is a society where the vital social, economic and political decisions are made democratically by the vast majority of workers instead of by a small group of politicians, bureaucrats, bankers, and executives. Both Solidarnosc in Poland and Solidarity in B.C. contained within them the seeds of genuine socialism, because both were democratic mass movements of workers challenging the basic priorities of the state and the ruling class. If ordinary working people had real control of society, they would put jobs and social services before megaprojects, health and food production before nuclear bombs, and human need in general before the dictates of profit.

For many reasons, not all working people are conscious of the need for solidarity and a militant fightback, and not all of those who are are prepared to organise and fight at a given point in time. The International Socialists believe that the militant minority of workers who see the need to

take a fighting stand against the system and all that it represents must be organised into a revolutionary workers' party. In the last analysis, what doomed the Solidarity movement from the start was not simply the maneuvers of the trade union bureaucracy, not simply the lies and intimidation of the Socred government, and not simply the lack of democratic participation by the rank and file. What was missing was a solid organisation of rank and file militants in the offices, schools, hospitals and factories, with the political clarity to expose the lies and maneuvers, to stand up to the intimidation, to build the democratic participation, and to spread socialist ideas at a time when hundreds of thousands of workers were questioning the basic assumptions of the system.

Capitalism isn't working. The great superpowers only got out of the last depression by starting WWII. But the human race cannot afford WWIII. Now more than ever, socialism is the only alternative to barbarism. Take a stand — join the International Socialists.

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A basic introduction to the ideas of Marxism, and how they guide action for socialism today.
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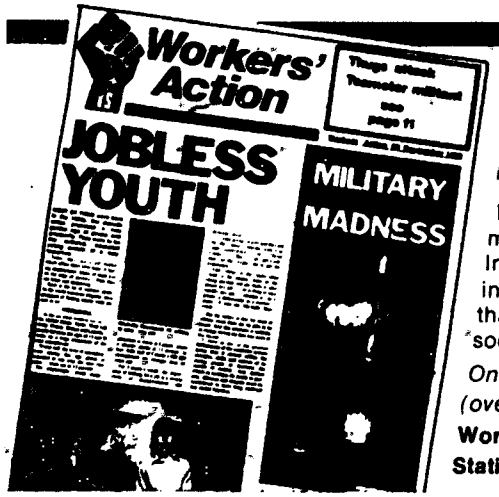

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Join...

We socialists are not fanatics or armchair critics. We are socialists because we see the prospect which life holds out for all working people. We want the commitment of workers who laugh and love and want to end the wretchedness and despair which shuts love and laughter out of so many lives. We do not have to spend the rest of our lives, and leave our children to spend the rest of their lives, wrestling in struggle against a mean and despotic ruling class. Society *can* be changed, but only if masses of working people abandon the rotten shipwreck of the 'leave it to us' reformers and commit themselves to change from below.

We are the infant of a revolutionary organisation which must grow if the possibility of socialism is to become a reality.

Are you interested?

If you agree with the views expressed in this pamphlet and would like more information, or would like to join the International Socialists, send this form to: International Socialists, Box 339, Station 'E', Toronto, Ontario.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

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IS Where We Stand

Workers' Power

Workers create all the wealth in society. Socialism can only be built when workers collectively seize control of the means to create that wealth and democratically plan its production and distri tion for human needs instead of for profit.

The working class must play the central role in the fight for a socialist society. Liberation can only be won through the struggles of workers themselves, organized independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power.

Revolution Not Reform

Capitalism cannot be patched up or reformed as the NDP and top union leaders say. The present system is based on the exploitation of workers and no attempts at reform can do away with this exploitation. Capitalism must be overthrown by the mass action of the working class. That is the only way workers can gain control of society and create a new system based on freedom and a decent life for all.

Socialism From Below

The structures of the present parliament, courts, state bureaucracy, army and police cannot be taken over and used by the working class. These institutions were developed under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers. The working class needs an entirely different kind of state — based on mass democratic councils of workers' delegates.

We stand for the principles of socialism from below — for the direct and democratic control of state and society by the working class.

Rank and File Unionism

Unions in Canada today are largely business machines that long ago stopped fighting in the interests of the working class. To turn unions back into organizations that fight in workers' interests, the rank and file must organize themselves independently of the bureaucratic union leaders. Only in this way can control of the unions be returned to the shop floor.

We work to help build rank and file organizations within the unions. By linking up local rank and file groups across the country, a real class struggle union movement can be built.

Fight Oppression

Capitalism divides the working class — pitting sections of workers against one another, men against women, race against race. Women, blacks, gays, immigrants and other groups suffer special oppression under capitalism. Sexist, racist and anti-gay ideas help foster and maintain these divisions, weakening the ability of workers to fight back collectively.

We oppose racism and and all immigration controls. We support the right of blacks, native people and other oppressed groups to organize for their rights and in their own defense.

We oppose sexism and anti-gay bigotry and are for real social, economic and political equality for women, gays and youth. We support all struggles of oppressed groups against any form of discrimination.

Internationalism

The working class has no nation. The fight for socialism is part of a world-wide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose patriotism and everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation movements. We support Quebec's right to self-determination.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country. Russia, Cuba, China and the Eastern European states are not socialist. They are state capitalist societies and part of one world capitalist system. We support the struggles of workers in these countries against their bureaucratic ruling classes.

Revolutionary Party

To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class must be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. The International Socialists are taking the first steps towards the building of such a party — rooted in the workplace and able to provide political direction within the working class movement.

As revolutionaries, we help to build every struggle that strengthens the self-confidence, organization and socialist consciousness of workers and the oppressed The revolutionary socialist party can only be built through the involvement of socialists in the daily struggles of workers and in the mass organizations of the working class

We urge all those who agree with our politics to join us in the struggle to build a revolutionary party